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JOSEPH BOUCHER DE NIVERVILLE

BY

ALBERT MATTHEWS

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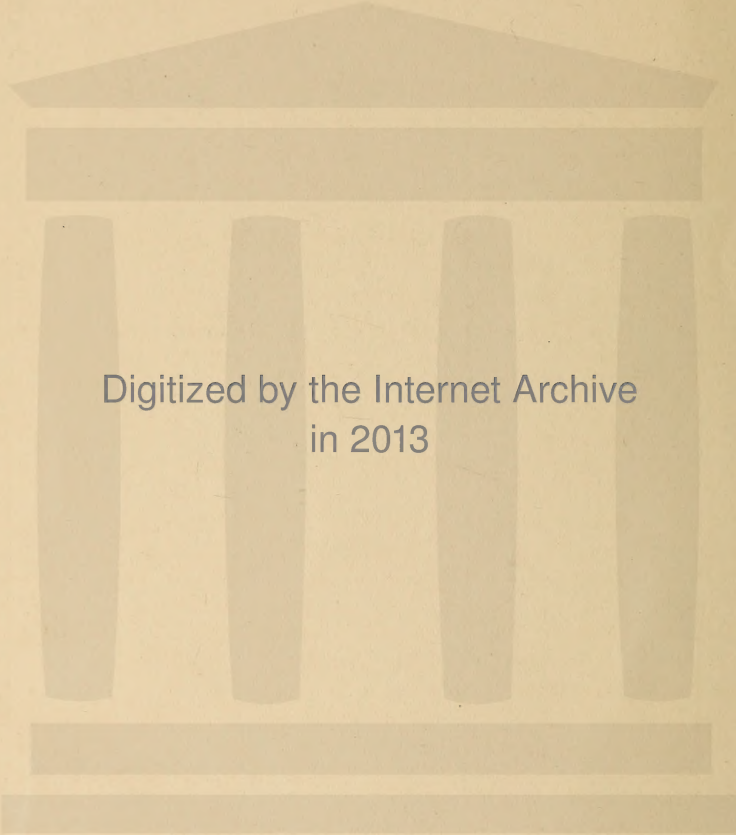
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JOSEPH BOUCHER DE NIVERVILLE.

It is well known that in 1747 the French and Indians attacked Township Number Four, now Charlestown, New Hampshire, at which time the fort at that place was defended by Captain Phinehas Stevens.¹ Who commanded the forces repulsed by Cap-

¹ Capt. Phinehas Stevens, the son of Joseph and Prudence (Rice) Stevens, was born at Sudbury, Massachusetts, 20 February, 1706-7 (Sudbury Town Records), and was baptized 27 April following (Sudbury Church Records). He married at Rutland, Massachusetts, 18 January, 1733-34, his cousin, Elizabeth Stevens, youngest daughter of Simon and Mary (Wilder) Stevens (Rutland Town Records). His christian name is often spelled Phineas, and in two documents he so spelled it himself (Massachusetts Archives, lxxiv. 51, xciii. 102); but in other documents he signed himself Phinehas Stevens (*Ibid.* lxxiii. 57, 210, 644, 690, xcii. 30, 85, 105, 201, xciii. 48, 74, 84), and his name is so spelled in the Records of his birth and baptism. For notices of Stevens, see Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography, v. 675, 676; New York Colonial Documents, x. 97 *note*; J. Farmer and J. B. Moore, Collections, i. 184; A. S. Hudson, Annals of Sudbury, Wayland, and Maynard, p. 22; H. H. Saunderson, History of Charlestown, N. H., pp. 556-568; C. Stark, Memoir and Official Correspondence of Gen. John Stark, pp. 372-385; Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society, v. 199-205; New Hampshire Provincial Papers, vi. 22, 312; and Year Book, Massachusetts Society of Colonial Wars, 1901, p. 84.

In a paper read before this Society in March, 1896 (Publications, iii. 220), Mr. Noble remarked that Stevens "is said" to have been presented with a sword by Sir Charles Knowles. The matter seems to be placed beyond a doubt by these extracts:—

"Friday last his Excellency Governour KNOWLES arrived here in the *Comet* Bomb from *Louisburg*" (Boston Gazette of Tuesday, 14 April, 1747, No. 1309, p. 3/1).

"We hear that the Honourable Commodore KNOWLES is so well pleased with the gallant Behaviour of Capt. Stevens, that he has given Orders to purchase the best silver-hilted Sword that can be made in Town, to be presented to that Gentleman, as an Acknowledgement for his Bravery and good Conduct" (Boston Evening-Post of Monday, 27 April, 1747, No. 611, p. 4/2).

"Last Week a very beautiful Silver-hilted Sword was purchased by Order, and at the Expense, of the Honourable Commodore KNOWLES, to be presented to Capt. Phinehas

tain Stevens, is a question which has never received an adequate answer. In a letter written 7 April, 1747, Captain Stevens himself said : —

“The Enemy . . . call'd to us, and desired a Cessation of Arms until Sun rise the next Morning, (which was granted) at which Time they said they would come to a Parley. Accordingly the *French General Debelina*¹ came with about 50 or 60 of his Men with a Flag of Truce,

Stevens, for his Bravery in the Defence of the Fort at N. 4. as was mention'd in our last” (Boston Post-Boy of Monday, 4 May, 1747, No. 650, p. 2/1).

Stark and Saunderson both give the sixth of April, 1756, as the date of the death of Captain Stevens; but that this date is erroneous, is shown by the following extracts : —

“We have an Account of the Death of Capt. Phinehas Stevens, who, in the Year 1747 bravely defended the Fort at N° 4 on the Frontiers of this Province, and whom Admiral Knowles presented with a handsome Sword for his gallant Behaviour” (Boston News-Letter of Thursday, 26 February, 1756, No. 2799, p. 2/1). The same notice appeared in the Boston Gazette of Monday, 1 March, 1756, No. 48.

“We have also the melancholy News of the Death of the brave Capt. *Phinehas Stevens*, Lieut. *Alexander*, and Ensign *Judd*, all of the *New-England Troops in Nova Scotia*” (Boston Evening-Post of Monday, 1 March, 1756, No. 1070, p. 2/2, 3).

The true date is doubtless the sixth of February, as appears from the gravestone of Capt. Stevens's wife in the cemetery at Charlestown, New Hampshire, which bears this inscription : —

Capt Phinehas Stevens
died at Chignecto, N. S. Feby 6, 1756, who had been for
many years in the Wars, and was Commandant of the Garrison
in this town, and at different periods had many combats with
the French and Indians.

Elizabeth, his wife, died Feby 15, 1778.

¹ The name is spelled “Debelina” in all the versions of this letter of 7 April, 1747, printed in the contemporary Boston newspapers, as specified in the note which follows. So far as I am aware, attention has not before been called to this fact. Belknap, writing in 1791, refers to the letter printed in the Boston Evening-Post of 27 April, 1747, but spells the name “M. Debelinè” (History of New-Hampshire, ii. 248); by President Dwight, the Frenchman is spoken of as “Monsieur Debelini” (Travels; in New-England and New-York, ii. 102, 103); but, as stated by Parkman, the usual form of the name is “Debeline.”

When Mr. Noble's paper, mentioned in the preceding note, was read, the real name of the French commander had not been discovered. Mr. Sulte's letter containing this information was received as the third volume of the Society's Publications, in which Mr. Noble's paper appeared, was going to press, and enabled the Committee of Publication to insert the full name of de Niverville in the plates and also in the index.

and stuck it down within about 20 Rods of the Fort, in plain Sight of the same, and said, if we would send 3 Men to him, he would send as many to us; to which we complied.”¹

Most American writers and historians have merely repeated the statement made by Stevens, and for one hundred and forty-five years the name of the French leader masqueraded under the disguise of General or Monsieur Debeline. In 1892, Francis Parkman gave for the first time — for the first time, that is, in a work written in English — the true surname of the French leader. He wrote: —

“The surrounding forest concealed what the New England chroniclers call an ‘army,’ commanded by General Debeline. It scarcely need be said that Canada had no General Debeline, and that no such name is to be found in Canadian annals. The ‘army’ was a large war-party of both French and Indians, and a French record shows that its commander was Boucher de Niverville, ensign in the colony troops.”²

It will be observed, however, that Parkman merely speaks of him as Boucher de Niverville, not specifying which Boucher. As there were at that time innumerable members of the Boucher family, probably Parkman did not care to take the trouble of dis-

¹ Boston Evening-Post of Monday, 27 April, 1747, No. 611, p. 4, where the letter is headed: “*The following is a Letter from Capt. Phinehas Stevens, Commander of the Fort at No. 4. about 40 Miles above Northfield, dated April 7th 1747.*” The letter is also printed in the Boston Post-Boy of Monday, 27 April, 1747, No. 649, p. 2; in the Boston Gazette of Tuesday, 28 April, 1747, No. 1311, p. 2; and in the Boston News-Letter of Thursday, 30 April, 1747, No. 2350, p. 2. To whom the letter was addressed is not stated in the contemporary newspapers. Saunderson and Stark, who print the letter, say that it was addressed to Gov. Shirley (History of Charlestown, p. 35; Memoir and Official Correspondence of Gen. John Stark, p. 380); while a very similar letter, printed in the Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society, iv. 109–113, is said to have been addressed to Col. W. Williams. The original letter would of course settle the point, but I do not know where the original is, a search in the Massachusetts Archives having failed to disclose it there. For the reference to the News-Letter, no copy of which is to be found in the Boston or Cambridge libraries, I am indebted to Mr. Edmund M. Barton, Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society.

² A Half-Century of Conflict, ii. 238, 239. The record referred to by Parkman is printed in French in Collection de Manuscrits contenant Lettres, Mémoires, et autres Documents historiques relatifs à la Nouvelle-France, iii. 272–313, 326–369; and in English in New York Colonial Documents, x. 89–132.

entangling individuals. In the New York Colonial Documents, Boucher is called "Chevalier de Niverville," "Ensign de Niverville," "M^r de Niverville," "Sieur de Niverville;"¹ but nowhere is there material for identification. O'Callaghan, however, for reasons which do not appear, entered the name in the index as Jean Baptiste Boucher de Niverville; and thus has the name appeared, since 1892, in all works in which the French Commander is mentioned. An appeal for information made to Sir John G. Bourinot was by him transferred to Mr. Benjamin Sulte, of Ottawa, the highest authority in Canada upon such matters. On Saturday last there came from Mr. Sulte² a letter which contained considerable matter already known, but in which was also found some valuable historical and genealogical material entirely new. The brief sketch which follows is largely drawn from this material.

Pierre Boucher de Grosbois, Governor of Three Rivers at various times from 1652 to 1667, was born in 1622, was twice married, after 1667 went to reside at Boucherville, and died 21 April, 1717.³ By his second wife, Jeanne Crevier, he had several children, of whom it is necessary to mention only two. The eldest, Pierre Boucher de la Broquerie, was born in 1653, married Charlotte Denys de la Trinité 25 October, 1683, and died 17 August, 1740. The latter's son Joseph Boucher, the date of whose birth is unknown, was twice married, served in the wars between 1744 and 1760, in 1756 built ships on Lake Ontario, in 1757 made a map of that lake, and died 28 February, 1762.⁴

¹ New York Colonial Documents, x. 32, 42, 96, 97.

² The correspondence with Sir John G. Bourinot and Mr. Sulte was conducted by Mr. Edes; but, owing to stress of work, Mr. Edes was unable to prepare a communication at this time and asked me to do so. In a subsequent letter, Mr. Sulte gave some additional details which have been incorporated in the text.

³ Pierre Boucher bought of Jacques Leneuf de la Poterie in 1660 a fief to which he gave the name of Niverville after a domain in Normandy near the place where Boucher was born. Fief Niverville, which had been purchased in 1648 by Leneuf from François de Champflour and had been obtained by the latter from the Hundred Partners about 1642, is now a part of Three Rivers. Boucher published in 1664 a book on New France, for a reprint of which see a paper by Mr. Sulte, entitled *Pierre Boucher et son Livre*, in the *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Second Series, ii. 99-168.

⁴ See Publications of this Society, iii. 378.

Returning, now, to Pierre Boucher de Grosbois, Governor of Three Rivers, it has been said that he had two sons, the elder being Pierre Boucher de la Broquerie. A younger son was Jean Baptiste Boucher de Niverville. Born 10 December, 1673, he married 10 February, 1710, Marguerite Thérèse Hertel, daughter of François Hertel de la Frénière, Seigneur de Chambly. Through his wife, Boucher inherited the seigneurie of Chambly, and in 1726 he was designated as Seigneur de Chambly.¹ In 1727 he took part in the campaign against the Fox Indians of Wisconsin;² and in 1732 and in 1740 he is referred to as Ensign.³ It is not known exactly when he died, though he appears to have been alive in 1748. He it was who, according to O'Callaghan, attacked Number Four; but the fact that in 1747 he was in his seventy-fourth year is enough to prove that he could not have been the leader of the French on that occasion.

Joseph Boucher de Niverville, the son of Jean Baptiste Boucher de Niverville, was born 22 September, 1715. On the first of April, 1742, at Versailles, the King prescribed that the Chevalier de Niverville be given the first commission as Ensign that might become vacant; and on the first of May, 1743, the King appointed him "Enseigne en second." In March, 1746, he started from Montreal and went towards Boston, returning to Canada in May with two prisoners.⁴ On April fourth, 1747, occurred the attack, which lasted three days, on Number Four.⁵ On 15 February, 1748, he was appointed by the King "Enseigne en pied." In 1748 he was again on the war-path, near Lake Champlain in April, and at Fort Massachusetts in August;⁶ and on 17 March, 1756, he was appointed Lieutenant by the King. In the spring of 1757 he approached Fort Cumberland on the Ohio, proceeded towards Virginia, and took some prisoners;⁷ in August he was present at the taking of Fort William Henry by Montcalm;⁸ and on 5 October, at Three Rivers, he was married to Josette Chatelin,⁹ daughter

¹ Edits et Ordonnances, ii. 518, 519, 529, 551.

² Daniel, *Grandes Familles*, p. 421.

³ Daniel, *Aperçu*, pp. 51, 59; Edits et Ordonnances, ii. 551.

⁴ New York Colonial Documents, x. 32, 42.

⁵ *Ibid.* x. 97.

⁷ *Ibid.* x. 580.

⁶ *Ibid.* x. 158, 177.

⁸ *Ibid.* x. 607.

⁹ Tanguay gives her name as Marie Joseph Chatelin.

of François Chatelin, retired Captain, by his second wife Marguerite Cardin. In 1759, he commanded Canadians and Indians at Sillery, near Quebec.¹ In 1762 or 1763 he was made Chevalier de Saint Louis, and his cross of Saint Louis, which he left to the church of Three Rivers, may still be seen there suspended to the ostensor. In October, 1775, he assisted Jean Baptiste Bouchette in the difficult task of safely conveying Governor-General Carleton from Montreal, then occupied by the Americans, to Quebec. Until about 1796, he remained superintendent of the Indian settlements at Bécancour and St. François-du-Lac (Lake St. Peter), and died at Three Rivers, where he was buried 31 August, 1804.

Three years ago Mr. Sulte had the kindness to inform us that the man who commanded the French and Indians in their attack on Wells in the summer of 1693, and whose identity had been obscured by American historians under various misspellings of his titular appellation, was Pierre Boucher de la Broquerie.² It now appears from Mr. Sulte's present letter, that the leader of the attack on Number Four was not only of the same family as the commander at Wells, but was the nephew of the latter. Thus, for a second time, we are indebted for valuable information to Mr. Sulte.³

¹ New York Colonial Documents, x. 994, 996, 1018.

² See Publications of this Society, iii. 378.

³ In preparing this paper, use has been made of the Dictionnaire Généalogique des Familles Canadiennes, par l'Abbé Cyprien Tanguay.

